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ALABAMA. GEOR

ADDRESS AT

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Alabama Governor, 1914 -

Thomas E.
Kilby

ADDRESS

OF

GOV. THOS. E. KILBY

AT THE

CITIZENS EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE



HELD IN BIRMINGHAM

APRIL 13, 1922

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Address of Governor Thos. E. Kilby at the Citizens Educational Conference, Held in Birmingham, April 13, 1922



SUPPOSE everyone understands that this is not a meeting of educators, teachers and school people generally, but that it is a conference of citizens who are especially interested in the cause of education. It is for the purpose of discussing and considering the educational situation and for the promotion of means and measures calculated to improve it. As stated in the call for the meeting, the improvement of schools and other educational agencies is not alone or principally the concern of teachers and professional educators. It is primarily and principally the concern of the people who have established the schools, who pay for them and who use them for the education of their children and for the development of their state. The people as a whole must decide directly or through their representatives how much and what kind of education they want to give the boys and girls of the State, through what agencies such education shall be provided, how efficient these agencies shall be and how much money shall be appropriated for the purpose and how that money shall be obtained. Of course, among the citizens called together for the consideration of these matters there are quite naturally many teachers, educators and school authorities, but their professional status will for the time being be subordinated or subjected to their broader status or capacity as citizens of Alabama.

Now, the people of Alabama have, through their chosen representatives, reached a decision on the question of a school system, and it is for you to ratify and support it if it meets with your approval. One of the first things the Legislature of 1919 did, following a recommendation in my first annual message to that body, was to provide for a State Education Commission charged with the duty of making a scientific study of the public school system of Alabama and reporting its findings with recommendations. A commission was appointed consisting of men of intelligence, of vision, of high character, of sound business judgment and of in-

tense patriotism. They summoned to their aid the best professional talent in the nation, experts in the several departments of educational work, and placed them under the supervision of the United States Bureau of Education. No pains or expense were spared in going to the bottom of things and what the investigators learned was embraced in a comprehensive report containing the history of education in Alabama, the merits and demerits of the system in vogue, comparisons with the work in other states together with recommendations for improvement of our methods. The Commission, using the report of the expert investigators as a basis, submitted its report with recommendations and bills were prepared embodying these recommendations and submitted to the Legislature at the adjourned session in 1919. Those bills were enacted and now form what is known as the Alabama School Code, which authorities in Alabama pronounce to be as nearly perfect as is possible under the restrictions and inhibitions of our State Constitution. The estimate placed upon it abroad is indicated by the fact that it is taught as a text book in some of the great universities of the country.

It placed Alabama, in theory, in the front rank.

Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, I say that the main question has been answered by the people acting through their representatives.

To the citizens who possess technical and professional knowledge I leave the discussion of the professional and pedagogical aspects of the subject, but there is one phase of the matter that I wish to say just a word about, the money side. It is money that makes the wheels go around. You may erect the most perfectly designed and the most carefully constructed piece of machinery ever conceived of and if you do not provide fuel to propel it and oil to keep its bearings lubricated the wheels will not go around very long and soon the beautiful machine will be fit only for the scrap pile.

Now while the Legislature was building this educational machinery it did not overlook the means of propelling it and keeping it oiled. A companion machine was built, a machine designed to equalize the assessment of property for taxation as a means of securing the fuel and the oil. A trial of two years has demonstrated that it is workable and efficient. A good start toward equalization has been made. In 1918 the average of assessment of property of the State was about 26% of its reasonable cash value. The assessment for 1920 and 1921

was about 35%. The assessment for 1922 will be about the same, or perhaps a little more, owing to decreased values. Only a good beginning has been made, but something approaching equalization is possible under the present law, and if it is made by raising the assessment of property now notoriously under-assessed to a point equal to the higher assessments there will be an abundance of funds to support the school system in all its parts and no property owner will be made to suffer an injustice.

But, I am sorry to say, the taxing machinery has its enemies. A temporary disturbance of business has thrown many men off their feet. Of course we all know that there has been financial distress among the people, but it has not been caused by high state tax bills. Federal taxes have been high and burdensome, but state taxes are the least of our burdens. If it were not so there would have been a stop to the voting of three-mill county and district levies. They have been adopted practically in all the counties and in many districts, many elections being held since the depression set in and more are proposed. Now mark this prediction. If wise counsels do not prevail in the next Legislature the whole structure so wisely prepared by the last Legislature will crumble and fall or be so impaired that it will fail of its object. And mark further!—The man who destroys the means of raising funds for education is an enemy to education, prate he ever so loudly of his love for the barefoot boys and girls and of his reverence for the little red school house on the hill! The cry of the demagogue is a familiar sound in Alabama, "Reduction of taxation," when taxes are far below the amount required by law—"economy"—false economy, the kind that saves at the spigot and wastes at the bung. "Stop waste and extravagance"—which do not exist—"abolish useless offices"—when there are none such—these have ever been the stock in trade of the demagogue and they perhaps always will be, but, my friends, it is a cry that contains a positive and serious menace to the welfare of Alabama and particularly to her educational interests and to the unfortunate and helpless wards of the State.

The assault upon the tax system will be directed toward the method of assessing property. In my judgment, those charged with the administration of the laws of the State will, when the responsibility rests upon their shoulders, realize the danger to the treasury involved in the proposal to destroy the assessment machinery and do their best to stay the

hand of the destroyer, but it may be too late. To go back to the old system of assessment by local assessors would mean the destruction of all progress in education for the fuel and the lubricant for your machinery would be found wanting. Local assessment of property means government by voluntary contribution! Government by voluntary contribution means precious little public education. Will you stand for it? Whether the effort is successful or not depends largely upon the friends of education. If the friends of education sit idly by and allow the propaganda against adequate taxation to take hold of the minds of the senators and representatives in the next Legislature it will be a sad and solemn day for education in Alabama.

Not only for education, but for the development of our agricultural and industrial interests. Alabama is a wonderful state—potentially. Providence has been kind to us. Nature was lavish in her legacy of resources. We are rich in fertile lands, in an unsurpassed climate, in minerals, in timber, in navigable streams and water powers, in everything necessary to the making of a great state. On no spot of this earth are the raw materials for manufacture so well assorted, so set apart, side by side, ready for immediate and convenient use as they are in this district of Alabama. It is as though the Creator had chosen this section of His universe for a test or demonstration of what the brain and the hand of man might accomplish in the working of His materials, selected by Him and set apart by Him for the purpose.

But what avails this rich and rare array of resources if they are not to be fully developed? And fully developed they never will be except through the scientific knowledge and technical skill of our own people—our own boys and girls of today who will be the men and the women and the builders of tomorrow. The agricultural and industrial progress of the State depends upon how we educate these boys and girls. The costliest possession of any state is its ignorance; we learn this from our own experience. The best paying investment of any state is education and knowledge; we learn that from the experience of others. The states that invested in education have reaped rich returns from the investment and they are continuing and multiplying the investment.

Compared with what other states have done Alabama makes a pitiful showing, but we are improving on our own record. Our system and methods

have been wonderfully improved as the result of the work of the Education Commission to which I have referred. Measured in dollars, we have made progress, as this memorandum indicates.

Expended by the State for all educational purposes from 1903 to 1921, by quadrenniums:

1903-1906	\$ 5,254,000
1907-1910	9,309,000
1911-1914	11,798,000
1915-1918	13,287,000
1919-1922*	19,000,000

*Expenditures for 1922 estimated.

You will observe that during the present quadrennium we are spending 19 million against 5¼ million in 1903 to 1906, nearly 4 times as much. More than double what we spent in the four years 1907-1910 and over 50% more than in each of the last two 4-year periods. And that is not half enough!

Now, the question is, shall we maintain the present progress, increase it or decrease it? The answer lies in what you are going to do with your system of taxation. There is no standing still. We will go forward or backward. If you follow those who preach "government by voluntary contribution" you will go backward with a rush. The alternative is to see that your legislators stand by the schools, stand by all that makes for the agricultural and industrial progress and give to Alabama her rightful place among the sisterhood of states—and let the demagogues go hang!

I hope this conference will not be satisfied with making and hearing speeches and passing mild, sugar-coated resolutions. I hope you will send forth a clarion call to all friends of education, to all patriotic citizens of the State, such a call as will arouse them to a sense of the danger that lies ahead and to a full realization of their duty to education in Alabama, from the University and Auburn down to the smallest unit of the rural school system. If you do so, and follow it up, this conference will mark a red letter day in our history and start a new era for education, for progress and for prosperity of the State and its people.



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